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AT HOME AND ABROAD— The Battle of the B-52s

CPYRGHT

By Raymond Lawrence

What General Twining really reported to President Eisenhower yesterday on his eight-day visit to the Soviet Union was not apparent in the news dispatch.

His statement that "there is no question about" American superiority over Russia in the "quality" of military planes has been made before.

After General Twining appears before a Senate committee in a few days, more of the report may be made public. In the meantime, there are a few observations that may prove helpful in evaluating this highly controversial question.

Since the air power problem is complex and technical, one can only rely on the experts. Ordinary citizens, which include most columnists and commentators, lack the official information and the background to make dogmatic declarations on the subject. And this goes for most politicians.

POLITICS INVOLVED

That is the trouble in Congress where the Democrats have sought to deprecate the adequacy of this Nation's air power and succeeded in adding nearly \$800,000,000 to the Administration's budget. The idea was to step up the production of B52s by that amount of money.

This was a political move, promoted and supported by the Air Force but not with the consent of Secretary of Defense Wilson or with the support of the President.

The fact that an election is coming up next November and that the American people want the best possible military defense were factors in the de-

cision. But it was not necessarily a wise or necessary action.

The effort to extract political advantage from this situation is confusing enough but what makes it worse is the fact that Air Force spokesmen usually fail to include all the components of our air power in their public estimates.

NAVAL AIR STRENGTH

This is misleading because naval air power is a tremendous asset. Aircraft carriers, of which we have the best in the world, can deliver nuclear weapons and missiles to almost any target in an enemy country, protect themselves against attack, while their maneuverability disperses an enemy's air strength over a huge area. They are floating bases that pack as big a wallop as land bases and yet are not sitting ducks as are the latter.

Our best military experts believe that in the next war the first knockout blows will be directed at land bases, not big centers of population, because only in this way can an aggressor nullify the possibility of massive retaliation.

This could mean that our principal air power would be carrier-based, which, if not for other reasons, the Navy is an indispensable element of our military establishment.

To ignore these considerations is neither accurate nor justifiable.

General Twining has repeatedly insisted that the Russians are ahead of this country in number of aircraft in produc-

tion, and in several instances, clearly, they are.

It is impossible for a layman to refute such testimony but there is some evidence bearing on the point. The Senate committee has received testimony that the U.S. aircraft industry is operating at 25 to 50 per cent of its capacity. In the event of trouble, it could speed up and outproduce the Russians. But if there is a war, there would be no time for such expansion as there has been in the past.

MORE SOVIET PLANES

A new book, purporting to be authoritative, by Richard E. Stockwell, says that last year the U.S. turned out 8,400 aircraft for the military services. Five thousand were combat types.

Russia in the same period produced 13,800 planes of all types. Of this number 60 per cent were military, according to the same source.

In other words, we were out-produced by 3,200 combat planes.

We know on the authority of Allen Dulles, director of CIA, that both countries are undergoing a fundamental transition in military equipment and probably tactics. So these figures may change radically as soon as a year from now and it is dubious whether we load up on B52s which soon could be as obsolete as the recent B47s.

This is the kind of situation in which one wishes the President would speak out. He enjoys the Nation's confidence in his military judgment and political integrity and the complexities are so great that probably no other American can